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JOINT UN/UNESCO SEMINAR ON URBANIZATION IN THE ECAFE REGION

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PROBLEMS OF CRIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY
[Item 3(d)]

Summary of Discussion

Prepared by

ECAFE Division of Social Affairs

For consideration of Item 3(d) of the agenda, the seminar had before it the document entitled "Urbanization and Crime and Delinquency in Asia and the Far East" (UNESCO/SS/CONF.URB/12, E/CN.11/URB/12) prepared by the Bureau of Social Affairs of the United Nations.

There was general consensus that adult crime and especially juvenile delinquency were intimately associated with the process of urbanization and that a number of countries of the region had already become seriously concerned at the proportions of the problem. In some instances, as pointed out by the representative of Indonesia in respect of his own country, the problem is not yet acute but certainly signs of potential difficulty have appeared already.

/The extent

The extent to which criminality results directly from the urbanization process was discussed and there was a general agreement that while a number of factors contributed to the genesis of criminal behaviours, the unsettling nature of urbanization contributed heavily to those social conditions and patterns of behaviour which produced crime and delinquency. At the same time, it was emphasized, especially by the delegate of India, that certain types of crime, or at least certain kinds of social abuse closely akin to crime, were being outlawed under the impact of the urbanization process.

The seminar recognized that the rural migrant on entering the urban life left behind him family influences and controls for which he could find no counterpart in urban life. He is, moreover, faced with new and often conflicting sets of values many of which are not in harmony with his rural background. He is also exposed to material advantages which are out of his reach. Out of this bewilderment, frustration and lack of guidance, the individual man acquires false values leading to crime and delinquency.

In the first wave of migration from the rural areas to the city, there is a preponderence of unattached males. This preponderance of unattached males contributes directly to the problem of prostitution which is a serious one in the large urban areas of Asia. Subsequent migrations are characterized by the preponderance of women and children. This does not, however, have the effect, as might be supposed, of re-establishing family life, partly because the time gap interferes with the established patterns, partly because the women must seek employment outside the home in order to supplement the family's marginal income and partly because the parents are not able to provide the guidance and supervision of the children which was possible in the simpler village societies where activities were centred around family agricultural activities and where members of the extended family could be called upon to assist in the up-bringing of the children.

/The economic

The economic position of the newly arrived rural migrant is a disadvantaged one. Sizeable migrations produce a glut on the employment market and the recently arrived migrant generally does not have the kind of occupational skill needed in the urban centre. He is generally restricted to casual labour which is poorly paid and offers little or no security. He generally must accept the least desirable housing and occupies the lowest place in urban society with respect to goods and services. The types of occupation available to women very often expose them to moral hazard; moreover, prostitution is a relatively lucrative source of income and is, therefore, tempting. The children must also work and either compete in the labour market against adults or take borderline jobs which expose them to corruption.

In addition, the rural migrant arriving in the city enters a culture which reflects certain established criminal patterns. He is little qualified to cope with them. Not only is he victimized but children especially are exploited and, in fact, recruited for begging, stealing, especially pick-pocketing, and above all prostitution.

It was brought out in the seminar that the sudden shift of population from rural areas to urban centres did not of itself necessarily produce crim nor could the industrialization process, per se, be regarded as a direct causative factor. What was critical, however, was the fact that social patterns which generally characterize urbanization and industrialization, namely, great shifts in social standards, break-down of traditional controls and lack of recognized authority contributed to crime. It was pointed out, particularly by the delegate of France, that parental neglect appeared to be a principal cause in juvenile delinquency. Parental neglect might take place under any circumstances; under the impact of urbanization, however, parental neglect was particularly prevalent.

Rural areas were reported to be essentially free from crime. Nevertheless, with the impact of the urban culture upon rural areas themselves there was a probability that criminality might extend to these areas as well. In contrast, it was apparent that in some of the large urban centers of Asia, significant segments of the population remained almost isolated from the urban culture and were thus more or less impervious to disorganizing factors of urban living. This, it was not correct to assume that the villagers had already made a successful transition to urban living on the basis of mere physical residence there for a number of years. In fact, it might be said that, from a sociological point of view,

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they continue to live in rural communities within the metropolitan centre. The pressing question was, therefore, what might be the impact when the urban culture truly permeated their lives.

The question was raised whether Asian countries must be resigned to accept as inevitable a high rate of criminality as the price to be paid for urbanization. This has been characteristic of urban development in the western countries. Must it be repeated in Asian countries undergoing rapid economic development accompanied by social change? On this, there was divergence of opinion. One contention was that social breakdown and social conflict with accompanying higher crime rates was inevitable and that countries must be ready to provide extensive programmes of social protection and social rehabilitation for offenders, including probation, juvenile courts, modern adult and juvenile institutions and the like. It was further suggested that these services might be thought of as being the urban equivalent of the social sanctions which provided the necessary control in rural settings.

On the other hand, the question was raised whether certain factors characteristic of Asian countries today might not contribute significantly to bridging the gap from rural life to a successful urban adjustment. One possible factor would be the general devotion to religion which was capable of providing the binding force and social control and stability needed in the transition. In this connection, reference was made to certain of the UNESCO studies on the social implications of industrialization and urbanization in which it was found that the urban life of the recently arrived migrant was characterized by a distinct increase in religious devotion. This was, of course, in contrast to western urban patterns where decreased religious activity was the case.

Another factor which might provide a force of a stability and unity was the high degree of nationalism prevailent in a majority of Asian countries. The identification with the aspiration of the countries as a whole might provide solidarity and purposefulness as a strength for urban adjustment. A third factor could be the orientation of the governments of the Asian countries toward the concept of the welfare state in which government was regarded as imtimately concerned with the well-being of each individual and responsible for the social progress and social protection of all. In connection with any consideration of factors in Asian life which might result in less criminality in Asia than ordinarily expected, the representative of the World Federation for Mental Health referred to preliminary findings of research in Thailand which

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suggested that reaction to frustration and emotional conflict resulted more in symptoms of neurotic anxiety and psychosomatic complaints than in overt aggressive behavior. Were these preliminary findings to be sustained and were they to have wide applicability, there would be great implications concerning the amount of criminality and juvenile delinquency to be anticipated in the future.

Moreover, Asian countries are in a position today to study the social programmes which have proved effective in the western countries in combating crimes and other forms of social disintegration and to adapt them to their needs.

Should the countries of the region rely primarily on providing sweeping programmes of social services to combat crime? Such an approach was seen to have great handicaps. In the first instance, it is questionable whether broad social welfare programmes could be afforded at this point in the development of Asian countries. Indeed, it was very few countries of the west, including the most prosperous ones, who felt satisfied that they had been able to provide all the social services necessary. Secondly, the national resources channelled into such programmes must inevitably then be withheld from other programmes of social and economic development. Finally, it was not too harsh to say that such programmes dealing with the adult and juvenile offenders were ameliorative at best.

Many of the general policies in connection with rapid urbanization apparently bear quite directly upon the problem of preventing crime. These include the deceleration of the urbanization process by providing to rural areas those facilities and opportunities which the ruralites, especially the youth, were seeking when they left the village for the city. Moreover, the rural migrant must be prepared for urban living and the urban centre must be prepared to receive him. In this connection reference was made to programmes deliberately aimed at maintaining the contact of the individual with his village, so that effective social controls familiar to him could be carried into urban living.

Finally, it was pointed out that for there adequately to be a comprehensive programme of crime prevention, it was not enough to rely upon a multiplicity of social services unrelated, directly, to crime. Chile welfare activities, housing developments etc. were important in themselves, but could not suffice in combating crime. The direct approach to the problem required independent action aimed not only at co-ordinating these services, but also in developing a specialized approach of its own.